

Understanding Del. 1, U.S. 13 and the tolls

By **Anne P. Canby**

The Delaware Department of Transportation has been receiving and responding to numerous questions and complaints about the recently-opened Biddles Corner-to-Odessa section of State Route 1 (SR-1), the tolls on that new highway and construction and traffic on adjacent Route 13. The department appreciates this opportunity to present these points to a broad audience, and to clarify those issues which are of great importance to Delaware motorists, residents, business owners and visitors.

While many local drivers have been enjoying quick and convenient travel on SR-1, others have contacted the department to express their unhappiness with the \$1 toll for two-axle vehicles at the Biddles Corner toll plaza. We have been reminding them that SR-1 is not intended primarily for local drivers making short-range trips. Instead, it was built for more longer-distance and regional travelers. Yet local motorists who use Route 13 will benefit from SR-1 without driving on it and without paying a toll.

SR-1 provides local drivers with the first real relief in years by removing a great deal of traffic from Route 13. Long-distance motorists are attracted to SR-1 because it offers a quick, safe and scenic alternative to Route 13. Those motorists including summertime beach-goers, year-round Rehoboth-bound outlet shoppers, Kent and Sussex countians traveling upstate and to points north, and northbound and southbound tractor trailers and other freight haulers, are happy to pay the nominal toll on SR-1 in order to avoid Route 13. Removing that traffic from Route 13 reduces congestion and increases safety and convenience for local drivers who can still use Route 13 without paying a toll.

Just how badly SR-1 is needed is clearly demonstrated in the following information. The annual population growth in Delaware since 1990 is one percent, yet "vehicle miles traveled" has grown at an average rate of over four percent in the same period. Nationwide, "time in vehicles" since 1990 has grown at an average annual rate of just less than one percent; however, in Delaware, "time in vehicles" has grown at an average annual rate of about 1.5 percent. Projections are that "time in vehicles" in Delaware will grow by another 35 percent by 2020. In the past 16 years, there has been a 70 percent increase in driving, primarily because people are driving farther and taking more trips.

Since the beginning of

December, traffic at the Biddles Corner Toll Plaza has ranged from 16,000 to 29,000 vehicles per day. According to the year 2000 traffic forecast data, an average of 59,484 vehicles will travel over the C&D Canal each day on SR-1 and Route 13. Traffic-forecast data indicate that nearly 60 percent of that traffic will use SR-1. That is some 35,000 vehicles per day, or almost 13 million during the entire year, that will avoid Route 13 in favor of SR-1 in 2000.

When that information and statistics are considered, the need for SR-1 and the relief it provides are obvious. SR-1 is an effective alternative route for long-distance travelers, and it has significantly improved the quality of life for the thousands of Delawareans who live, work and commute along Route 13. Those were the department's goals when SR-1 was designed and constructed. Those benefits are even more pronounced now that construction on Route 13 just south of the C&D Canal is complete.

That construction, and the traffic congestion it caused, had prompted calls and letters to the DelDOT External Affairs Office. Motorists told us they were staying off of SR-1 to avoid the toll, but were frustrated and angered by traffic congestion in the Route 13 construction area. The department recognized that action was needed and quickly responded.

DelDOT's Expressways and Traffic divisions spent the weekend before Thanksgiving restriping the shoulder of northbound Route 13 south of the C&D Canal to provide a temporary bypass lane. In addition, signs were installed to encourage motorists in cars to stay to the right, use the temporary bypass lane and continue north on Route 13 over the old St. Georges Bridge. This enabled northbound drivers to avoid some of the congestion previously experienced at the signal light near the ramp to access the new bridge over the C&D Canal. Also, traffic signal timing was adjusted to facilitate predominant traffic movements of northbound travel

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